

Lost in Complexity? Readability and Emotional Shifts in Romanian Literature Textbooks

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Abstract

Keywords:

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Educational materials are indispensable for literacy development, cognitive engagement, and knowledge acquisition in education, especially at primary and secondary levels. While readability research covers many contexts (designing textbooks for different domains), this field is particularly underexplored in Romania. Studies on linguistic overload in Romanian textbooks suggest that modern materials frequently exceed students' cognitive capacities, and reveal a correlation between increased linguistic complexity and declining student performance. The transition from a single-textbook system to a multi-textbook model in post-communist Romania offers more diverse resources, but increased lexical/syntactic complexity, potentially obstructing student engagement. We propose a comparative-analysis framework for evaluating literature textbooks, using corpus-based approaches. We compare Romanian textbooks used in high schools from two periods: ROTEX-OLD (pre-1989, communist state-approved textbooks), and ROTEX-NEW (2014-2024, diversified textbooks currently in use). Findings indicate an increase in linguistic complexity (i.e. low readability) in contemporary textbooks. Corpus analyses reveal that modern textbooks often exceed grade-appropriate readability levels, increasing cognitive strain. Sentiment analysis highlights a shift in emotional tone, with ROTEX-OLD textbooks characterized by patriotic and propagandistic themes, while ROTEX-NEW materials incorporate a more pessimistic perspective. This shift is correlated with linguistic features. The study advocates for linguistics-supported textbook readability assessments to balance linguistic complexity and pedagogical accessibility.

1. Introduction

In secondary education, educational materials play an important role in literacy development, cognitive engagement, and knowledge learning. Students' ability to comprehend and thoughtfully interact with such materials directly impacts their academic performance and long-term intellectual development. Beyond the classroom, these skills are essential for civic formation, as many of these students, in their final high school years or immediately thereafter, will be called to participate in elections for the first time. In societies where democratic institutions are fragile and public discourse is often marked by disinformation and propaganda, cultivating critical thinking empowers youngsters to evaluate sources, resist manipulation, and make informed decisions. At the same time, the emotional tones embedded in educational texts – whether optimistic, nationalistic, or pessimistic – shape students' psychological responses and worldview. Exposure to excessively sombre or negatively charged narratives can reinforce feelings of disillusionment or passivity, while balanced and critically framed materials can foster resilience, empathy, and active democratic engagement. Thus,

educational practices that foster analytical literacy extend their impact beyond academic achievement, contributing to the resilience of democratic culture itself, by influencing even how citizens interpret reality as a form of discourse.

In this process, readability plays a strategic role: when texts are accessible and well-structured, students can engage with complex ideas critically, identify bias, and discern implicit messages. By contrast, texts that exceed students' cognitive capacities – due to excessive lexical density, syntactic complexity, or opaque discourse structures – can hinder comprehension and limit critical thinking development. Readability has been extensively studied in various educational contexts, including content textbooks (Hill & Erwin, 1984), mathematics course books (Çetinkaya et al., 2018), and foreign language literature textbooks (Calafato & Gudim, 2022). Early research (Aukerman, 1965; Dale & Chall, 1949) laid the foundation for readability analysis, emphasizing its impact on comprehension and learning outcomes. More recent studies (Hakim et al.,



2021; Owu-Ewie, 2014) highlight the ongoing challenges in aligning textbook readability with students' cognitive capacities, particularly in high school settings.

However, in Romania, research on the readability of high school literature textbooks remains significantly underexplored, with limited studies addressing its impact on student comprehension and academic performance. Research on linguistic overload in Romanian school textbooks (Chitez, 2024) suggests that modern materials frequently exceed students' cognitive capacities, reducing comprehension and motivation. A recent study the 8th-grade National Assessment (Chindriș, 2024) reveals a correlation between increased linguistic complexity and declining student performance. The transition from a single-textbook system to a multi-textbook model in post-communist Romania has expanded available materials but increased lexical density and syntactic complexity, potentially hindering student engagement (Chitez & Rogobete, 2024). Recent advancements in readability assessment, such as the LEMI Readability Platform (Chitez et al., 2024), provide new insights for evaluating didactic materials.

2. Method

2.1. Corpora and educational materials

This study proposes a multidimensional comparative-analysis framework for evaluating literature textbooks, using corpus-based approaches. We compiled two distinct corpora of Romanian high school literature textbooks to enable a comparative analysis of linguistic and discursive evolution: ROTEX-OLD (pre-1989), which includes state-approved textbooks from the communist era, and ROTEX-NEW (2000-2024), which encompasses the diversified textbooks currently in use.

The ROTEX-OLD corpus comprises four Romanian literature textbooks for high school, one for each grade level from 9th to 12th (approximately 400 000 words). To ensure consistency, we selected versions published in the 1970s and 1980s. These versions represent the standardized, state-approved materials released by the state publishing house, Didactic and Pedagogical Publishing House (Editura Didactică și Pedagogică). The ROTEX-NEW corpus comprises 20 high school literature textbooks covering grades nine through 12, published between 2004 and 2023. For each textbook, we recorded the grade level, publishing house, and year of publication (see Table 1). Unlike ROTEX-OLD, which reflects the

uniformity of a state-controlled canon, ROTEX-NEW illustrates the pluralism of the post-1989 educational landscape. The corpus includes materials from multiple publishers (approximately 2 million words), such as Art, Humanitas, Corint, Sigma, Niculescu, and All, and sometimes includes several competing editions for the same grade level. For example, 11th grade textbooks are represented by at least five different publishers. Even within a single publishing house, such as Corint, multiple versions coexist. For instance, there are three distinct textbooks for 11th grade and two for 12th grade, both published in 2014. The diversity of ROTEX-NEW is the result not only of market and ideological liberalization, but also of institutional and academic interests in publishing. The main editor of a textbook is usually a renowned university professor affiliated with a prominent Faculty of Letters. This lends authority to the volume. This practice reflects an attempt to legitimize textbooks as scholarly products. By contrast, the authors of communist-era textbooks (ROTEX-OLD) were primarily educational science specialists and secondary philologists or literary scholars, often appointed or approved by the Ministry of Education. Their role was less to provide literary and theoretical perspectives and more to ensure ideological alignment.

Table 1

Textbooks used for the study

No.	Corpus	Grade	Publishing House	Year of publication
1	ROTEX-OLD	9	Editura Didactică și Pedagogică	1988
2	ROTEX-OLD	10	Editura Didactică și Pedagogică	1981
3	ROTEX-OLD	11	Editura Didactică și Pedagogică	1983
4	ROTEX-OLD	12	Editura Didactică și Pedagogică	1977
1	ROTEX-NEW	9	Art	2017
2	ROTEX-NEW	9	Art Klett	2022
3	ROTEX-NEW	9	Humanitas	2008
4	ROTEX-NEW	10	Art	2010
5	ROTEX-NEW	10	Art Klett	2023
6	ROTEX-NEW	10	Corint	2008
7	ROTEX-NEW	10	Humanitas	2006
8	ROTEX-NEW	11	All	2006
9	ROTEX-NEW	11	Art	2018

10	ROTEX-NEW	11a	Corint	2014
11	ROTEX-NEW	11b	Corint	2014
12	ROTEX-NEW	11c	Corint	2004
13	ROTEX-NEW	11	Humanitas	2006
14	ROTEX-NEW	11	Sigma	2006
15	ROTEX-NEW	12	Art	2009
16	ROTEX-NEW	12a	Corint	2014
17	ROTEX-NEW	12b	Corint	2014
18	ROTEX-NEW	12	Humanitas	2007
19	ROTEX-NEW	12	Niculescu	2007
20	ROTEX-NEW	12	Sigma	2007

This difference highlights a first significant shift: while the post-1989 ROTEX-NEW corpus reflects a plurality of literary canons curated by established university professors, the ROTEX-OLD materials demonstrate the state's monopolization of cultural transmission through pedagogical and ideological expertise.

A literary canon or multiple literary canons?

Before analysing selected textbook excerpts and their emotional tone, it is important to situate our discussion within the Romanian literary canon as represented in school textbooks. In its narrow sense, the didactic (literary) canon may be understood as a fixed list of representative writers associated with specific cultural codes, historical epochs, and aesthetic models – critically validated and “resistant in time” – thus contributing to the officialization of a uniform corpus grounded in the aesthetic evaluation of literature (Oprescu, 2011). Such a canon, as Simionescu (2022) points out, is marked by excessive stability, artificial simplification, hierarchical structuring, accessibility, conservatism, and claims to value and representativity. At the same time, it incorporates the “values, questions, intentionalities, and narratives” through which human nature is defined (Borza, 2015; Nemoianu, 1991). In a broader sense, however, the canon remains a contested and dynamic construct, a “travelling concept” (Borza, 2015), constantly (re)negotiated within cultural and pedagogical debates. This view resonates with Nemoianu's (1990) assertion that literary value is not intrinsic but rather positional and relative, shaped by socio-psycho-historical functions responding to the needs of specific communities in given contexts. The

canon shapes not only what students read but also how they are trained to interpret literature as a reflection of culture, ideology, and identity. Under communism, the canon was restrictive and prescriptive, favouring certain authors aligned with the regime while marginalizing others. Several authors were considered classics because they expressed national identity and narratives, such as Mihai Eminescu and Ion Creangă. Sadoveanu became ubiquitous, transformed into the emblematic prose writer of the regime. Meanwhile, Marin Preda, Zaharia Stancu, Titus Popovici, and Fănuș Neagu partly solidified the socialist realist dimension of the canon. Alongside these authors, poets such as Eugen Jebeleanu, Mihai Beniuc, Miron Radu Paraschivescu, and, later, Nichita Stănescu and Marin Sorescu were selectively incorporated. This reflects both ideological pressures and a degree of openness to modernist experimentation. At the same time, the canon extended backward into folklore and early modern literature. It drew on authors such as Ion Neculce, Ion Budai-Deleanu, Vasile Alecsandri, and Petre Ispirescu. Meanwhile, Alexandru Vlahuță and Șt. O. Iosif provided patriotic and moralistic tones that resonated with the ideological imperatives of the time. This selective inclusivity illustrates how the canon functioned as both an educational and political tool, shaping students' exposure to literature through a tightly controlled framework.

Although one might expect that the post-1989 educational system in Romania would bring about a radical shift in both curriculum and reading lists, the changes have in fact been more ideological than structural. The current curriculum, which has been in place for the past three decades, still operates with a relatively fixed list of canonical authors (17 authors: Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, I. L. Caragiale, Ioan Slavici, G. Bacovia, Lucian Blaga, Tudor Arghezi, Ion Barbu, Mihail Sadoveanu, Liviu Rebreanu, Camil Petrescu, G. Călinescu, Titu Maiorescu, Eugen Lovinescu, Marin Preda, Nichita Stănescu, Marin Sorescu) and a set of mandatory literary species and textual forms. Teachers are formally given the freedom to choose which text by a canonical author they include in their classes, yet they remain bound to cover particular literary species (epic, lyric, dramatic) and formal categories. In practice, this leads to a lack of diversification: most high school students will end up studying no more than twenty texts across the four years of secondary education, with an overwhelming emphasis placed on preparation for the *bacalaureat* examination.

For university-level teaching, this curricular rigidity produces an additional difficulty: many canonical authors are already so overexposed in high school that they risk becoming mere clichés. University professors are thus faced with a double task: on the one hand, to recontextualize canonical figures by showing that their œuvre extends beyond the handful of texts recycled in pre-university teaching; on the other hand, to draw attention to marginalized or non-canonical authors who, while excluded from the didactic canon, are nevertheless of high cultural or textual value.

To sum up, before 1989, the Romanian curriculum was built around a set of authors provided their works could be interpreted in line with the official discourse (whether real valuable or names associated with socialist realism who were elevated to the rank of national figures). After 1989, the ideological layer was stripped away. Socialist-realist writers disappeared overnight from the curriculum, and the new system sought to distance itself from the prescriptive, propagandistic model of the communist school. Another shift in these educational materials is represented by the framework: communist textbooks carefully framed the work within a national-historical narrative and an ideological grid. Context came first, interpretation followed. After 1989, this pattern shifted. The new textbooks aimed to normalize literary study in line with Western academic trends. Instead of ideological introductions, they privileged theoretical – aka textual categories and typologies. For example, *Moara cu noroc / The Lucky Mill* by Ioan Slavici was no longer framed solely as a story about social conflict under emergent capitalism, but as a paradigmatic realist and psychological novella. *Luceafărul* by Eminescu was read less as a “national myth” and more as an example of Romanticism, mythopoesis, and philosophical allegory. Under communism, literature was treated as a tool of collective identity and ideological formation; after 1989, literature became primarily an object of technical analysis within the framework of literary theory.

Yet this theoretical emphasis raises an important question: how accessible are the texts we ask students to read and analyse? Readability becomes an important issue here, since the gap between canonical authority and students’ actual capacity to engage with the text often shapes their reception of literature.

2.2. Readability and LEMI platform

Readability has been studied for more than 100 years. It refers to how easily a reader can understand a

written text. Several factors influence readability, including vocabulary complexity, sentence length, syntactic structure, and overall cohesion. In educational and linguistic research, measuring readability helps determine if a text is suitable for its intended audience, supports learning objectives, and meets accessibility standards. However, most traditional readability formulas, such as the Flesch Reading Ease or Gunning Fog Index, were developed for English and rely on language-specific features, such as syllable count per word and sentence length. However, applying these formulas directly to Romanian texts can produce misleading results because Romanian has different morphological and syntactic characteristics than English. To address this issue, Chitez et al. (2024) developed the LEMI platform and formula. It is the only “app that integrates a research-based readability formula for the Romanian language” (Chitez et al., 2024). The platform allows authenticated users to analyse the complexity of their uploaded texts. It indicates the text’s group, age level, and complexity level (easy: 1, medium: 2, hard: 3), as well as lexical diversity, number of archaisms and regionalisms, number of syllables and words, and number of complex sentences. Figure 1 shows an example of output from the LEMI platform (www.lemi.ro) for an excerpt from *La Tazlău* by Calistrat Hogaș (included in ROTEX-OLD):

Figure 1

Example Output from LEMI Platform: Readability Analysis

Analysis results	
Grade:	Complexity:
9	3
	Age:
	15, 16 years
Lexical Diversity:	0.71%
Archaisms:	0
Regional Words:	24
Words:	282
Syllables:	596
Sentences:	5
Complex Words (>3 Syllables):	38
Unique Words:	201
Unique Complex Words:	36
Characters:	1750
Characters without spaces:	1656

For our analysis, we selected texts from the ROTEX-OLD and ROTEX-NEW textbooks, processing them using the LEMI platform to assess their readability according to Romanian-specific metrics. In addition to readability analysis, we performed a sentiment analysis using VADER (Hutto

& Gilbert, 2014) and Google Colab to evaluate the emotional tone of the texts. We also used Sketch Engine (Kilgarriff et al., 2004) to perform a lexical analysis of the two corpora.

3. Results

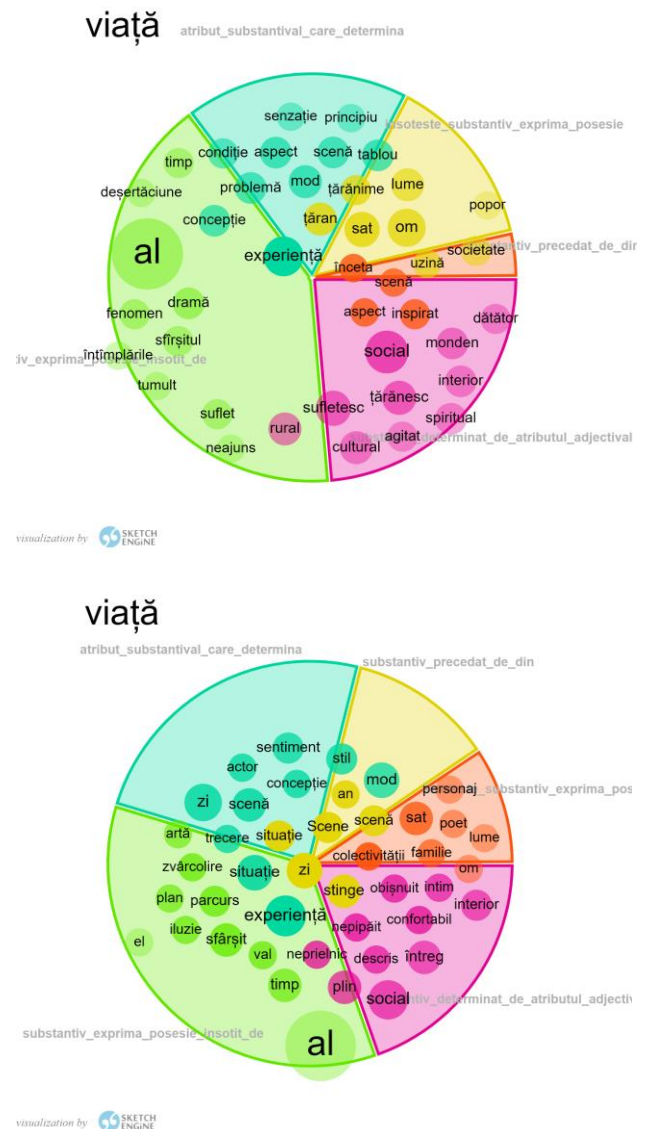
3.1. Lexical and Collocational Findings Using Sketch Engine

Taking a closer look at the frequency data generated with Sketch Engine highlights several differences between the ROTEX-OLD and ROTEX-NEW corpora. The vocabulary in earlier textbooks reflects the ideological orientation of the time. The prominence of terms such as *human, world, life, country, people, land* shows how educational materials were used to shape a vision of the “new socialist man”, embedded in a collective national narrative. According to the logic of socialist realism, educational and literary discourse was responsible for representing the historical destiny of “the people” as a totalizing entity (see Table 2).

Table 2
Lexical frequencies

Word	Frequency per million – ROTEX-OLD	Frequency per million – ROTEX-NEW
Lume/World	1,179.59	992.50
Viață/Life	1,347.23	164.38
Țară/Country	743.30	50.63
Popor/People	502.94	255.58
Om/Human	1,951.16	1,101.05
Pace/Peace	107.05	46.12
Națiune/Nation	60.6	3.12
Pământ/Land	230.26	162.3
Partid/Party	44.44	56.18
Socialism	18.18	3.12
Moarte/Death	506.98	297.54
Crimă/Crime	18.18	25.32
Rău/Evil	84.83	54.79
Pozitiv/Positive	34.34	35.37
Negativ/Negative	44.44	64.5

Figure 2
Word sketch for "life" (OLD vs NEW)



By contrast, the ROTEX-NEW corpus tells a slightly different story. The texts shift toward a more individualized perspective, since they display a marked decline in the frequency of such collectivist terms. Here, texts are not framed by a politically charged worldview, but instead are analysed from formal and theoretical perspectives with an emphasis on narrative structure, stylistic features, and literary techniques. A word sketch of “life” (see Figure 2) indicates that literary texts promoted during communism tended to emphasize collective experiences, focusing on peasants, everyday fabrics of life, social dramas, the inevitability of death, and general hardships. Modern texts adopt a more analytical approach, exploring themes such as inner restlessness, illusions, and personal adversity. These works shift attention from collective identities to individual characters, examining their psychological

depth, personal dilemmas, and nuanced responses to social pressures, while still occasionally engaging with broader societal concerns. This focus allows students to identify more directly with the characters, making the reading experience more striking and engaging. However, the often pessimistic tone of these works, highlighting misfortune and existential struggle, can also have a negative emotional influence on students, potentially affecting their perception of human agency and the possibilities for positive outcomes.

3.2. Readability Assessment of ROTEX

Findings indicate a marked increase in linguistic complexity (i.e. low readability) in contemporary textbooks. While ROTEX-OLD materials featured structured instruction with controlled linguistic input, modern textbooks integrate a broader range of texts and multimodal strategies but do not necessarily enhance accessibility. Corpus analyses reveal that modern textbooks often surpass grade-appropriate readability levels, increasing cognitive strain (see Table 3).

Table 3
Readability levels

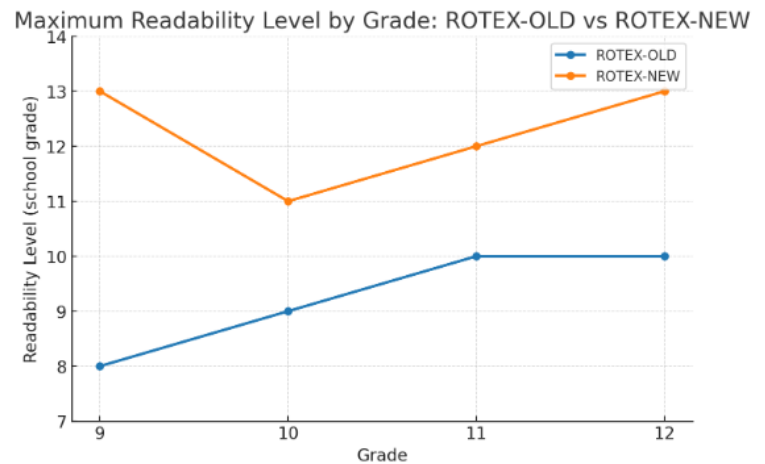
Grade	Maximum level in ROTEX-OLD	Maximum level in ROTEX-NEW
9	8 th grade, medium level	>12 th grade, hard level
10	9 th grade, hard level	11 th grade, medium level
11	10 th grade, easy level	12 th grade, medium level
12	10 th grade, hard level	>12 th grade, hard level

The data show a clear increase in linguistic complexity in contemporary textbooks (ROTEX-NEW) compared to the older ROTEX-OLD materials. The readability analysis demonstrates that modern textbooks are often more challenging than the students' expected level. ROTEX+OLD are close to expectations and students' level, while ROTEX-NEW are above students' immediate reading proficiency – for instance, for the 9th grade, there is a significant gap between students' reading skills and text difficulty. Modern textbooks prioritize also wider range of texts and multimodal strategies (different types of articles and reviews, letters, administrative texts etc. – so several nonfictional texts which were not often available in earlier textbooks), yet this has not improved accessibility. Instead, readability analyses suggest that many contemporary materials impose excessive cognitive demands, possibly affecting comprehension and learning efficiency. ROTEX-OLD

levels (see blue line in Figure 2) stay close to or slightly above the students' grade, showing manageable text complexity. ROTEX-NEW levels (orange line in Figure 2) often exceed the expected grade level, especially in grades 9 and 12, highlighting the mismatch between text difficulty and students' reading abilities. The chart from Figure 3 clearly shows the trend toward higher cognitive demand in modern textbooks.

Figure 3

Visual representation of the gap in readability levels from ROTEX-OLD to ROTEX-NEW



3.3 Emotional Profiling of Texts through Sentiment Metrics

When analysing the educational materials, it's important to note that only a few author names appear in both the older (communist-era) texts and the modern ones. Due to this overlap, it is more meaningful to focus on measuring texts that differentiate the two corpora (ROTEX-OLD and ROTEX-NEW). A quantitative analysis of tone in Romanian textbooks reveals distinctions using a VADER-style sentiment breakdown. If in ROTEX-OLD we can identify an average stating the following scores: 'neg': 0.003, 'neu': 0.992, 'pos': 0.005, ROTEX-NEW shows slightly divergent scores: 'neg': 0.55, 'neu': 0.42, 'pos': 0.03. Needless to say, applying automated models to evaluate stylistic features, rhetorical devices, or figurative language in literary texts is considerably more challenging than performing sentiment analysis on product reviews (Briciu et al., 2024). Literary stylistics involves subtle, context-dependent elements such as irony, metaphor, or narrative tone, which are difficult for current NLP models to detect reliably. Consequently, quantitative assessments of style often require aggregation across multiple texts or hybrid approaches combining automated tools with expert human interpretation.

The emotional states expressed in texts vary from neutral to uplifting tones or compassion for certain society classes in ROTEX-OLD, to pessimistic tones related to critical reflections and fatalism in ROTEX-NEW. For instance, a quoted text from one of Ceaușescu's speeches emphasizes unity, heroic labor, and societal progress, presenting an idealized vision of life under the regime: „Let us unite, all peoples,/ In struggle, both small and great,/ To live freely under the sun,/ Without nuclear arms at all!// Let us all shout once again,/ May those who seek war perish,/ Let there be flowers on the fields,/ And a world of human kindness!// Let the weeds in the fields be gone,/ May hatred vanish from the world,/ All those with a good heart - / East and West - hand in hand” ('neg': 0.05, 'neu': 0.55, 'pos': 0.40). On the other hand, texts that are common to both OLD and NEW textbooks frequently include narratives that depict crime, violence, and social conflict. Examples include *The Hatchet (Baltagul)*, *Ion*, *The Last Night of Love*, *the First Night of War*, and *The Lucky Mill*. These works do not shy away from harsh realities: crimes, murders, and personal vendettas are central to the plot and often drive character motivation. In *Ion*, for instance, the narrative includes not only murder but also sexual violence, highlighting the vulnerability of women within patriarchal structures (see Parvulescu & Boatecă, 2022). Racism and ethnic prejudice appear in *The Lucky Mill* and *Ion*, reflecting social hierarchies and tensions in (mostly) rural communities.

4. Discussion: Shifts in Romanian Literature Textbooks

Our study reveals that there are three major shifts from earlier (ROTEX-OLD) to contemporary (ROTEX-NEW) textbooks. First of all, there is a lexical shift: In the ROTEX-OLD materials, the lexical field is dominated by collectivist notions such as *people, life, country, world*. Vocabulary emphasizes the socialist „Weltanschauung”, emphasizes community, social unity, reflecting the ideological and propagandistic aims of the period. Contemporary textbooks broaden the lexical range, incorporating terms related to individual experience, psychological states, and abstract concepts – this lexical complexity brings also therefore an emotional complexity, but also a shift in readability. Modern materials contain various text boxes (dictionaries, explanations etc.) which increase cognitive demand by requiring students to process layered meanings. This complexity presents both a challenge and an opportunity. It enriches students' analytical skills, but it can create accessibility issues if not addressed appropriately.

Sentiment analysis reveals a final shift in emotional tone. There is a marked change in the affective quality of the texts. ROTEX-OLD materials typically convey a positive, uplifting, or propagandistic tone, emphasizing social cohesion, ideological optimism, and collective achievement. Contemporary textbooks, by contrast, often explore darker or more ambivalent themes, including moral conflict, social injustice, and the fragility of human life. This tone may reflect pessimism, existential reflection, or critical engagement with social realities, offering students opportunities to reflect on ethical dilemmas, human vulnerability, and societal change.

Romanian literature, particularly from the late 19th century through the interwar period, often portrays violence as an integral part of social life, whether through physical confrontations, exploitation, or systemic injustice. These texts explore the psychological and moral consequences of violent acts on individuals and communities, combining social critique with narrative tension. Incorporating such material into textbooks exposes students to complex ethical dilemmas, the darker sides of human behaviour, and the historical realities that shaped Romanian society (engaging with literature in these textbooks can feel remarkably akin to tuning in to the 5 o'clock evening news).

The depictions of violence, crime, and social injustice in Romanian literature raise important questions about how society chooses to educate young people. Including such narratives in textbooks encourages critical thinking and moral reflection by exposing students to the complexity of human behaviour and the consequences of unethical actions. At the same time, educators must balance this exposure with guidance, discussion, and contextualization, so that students do not become desensitized or overwhelmed by brutality.

Ultimately, the question becomes: What kind of citizens do we want literature to help cultivate? Do we aim to nurture empathy, ethical awareness, and social responsibility by confronting the darker aspects of life, or do we prioritize protective, idealized narratives that emphasize unity, heroism, and social harmony? The presence of violence in these texts underscores the potential of literature not merely to entertain, but to shape informed, reflective, and morally conscious members of society, who can navigate ethical dilemmas and understand the consequences of their actions within historical and social contexts. At the same time, it is equally important to provide students

with literature that models positive, prosocial behaviours and constructive responses to conflict, so that they can develop nonviolent strategies for coping with challenges, fostering empathy, and engaging responsibly with others.

Further research could build on this analysis using advanced computational approaches, such as text classification as in Gavrilă et al. (2021), or other methods of topic modelling and corpus-based analysis. Such methods would allow a more systematic exploration of thematic, stylistic, and lexical patterns across textbooks, offering deeper insight into how educational materials encode social, cultural, and ideological values.

5. Conclusions

In conclusion, comparing ROTEX-OLD and contemporary textbooks reveals significant shifts in lexical choice, structural complexity, and emotional tone. While older texts emphasize collectivist ideals, propagandistic positivity, and accessible language, modern textbooks foreground individual experience, psychological depth, and morally or socially complex situations. Sentiment analysis highlights a shift in overall tone, with ROTEX-OLD textbooks characterized by dramatic, patriotic, and propagandistic themes, whereas ROTEX-NEW materials tend to incorporate a more individualistic perspective. However, this shifts to a rather pessimistic and sombre perspective, reflecting societal anxieties and existential concerns common in contemporary Eastern European literature. This shift in sentiment correlates with linguistic features, as modern textbooks exhibit higher lexical density, increased syntactic complexity, and a greater prevalence of abstract and negatively connoted vocabulary, which may further contribute to students' cognitive overload and reduced comprehension. These differences also interact with generational experiences, as students engage differently with materials shaped by distinct historical and ideological contexts. Furthermore, retaining canonical authors in the curriculum does not necessarily require reproducing all their most violent or morally challenging texts. Educators and curriculum developers can exercise selective inclusion, choosing works that exemplify the author's stylistic proficiency, thematic concerns, or cultural significance while minimizing exposure to disturbing content (take into consideration, for instance, *Adam and Eve* by Rebreanu or *The Place Where Nothing Happened* by Sadoveanu).

This study advocates for linguistics-supported textbook readability assessments as a vital tool for balancing linguistic complexity with pedagogical accessibility. By systematically analysing lexical fields, syntactic structures, and stylistic features, educators and curriculum developers can ensure that textbooks are not only intellectually challenging but also appropriately adapted to students' developmental and cognitive needs. Such assessments help identify potential comprehension obstacles, reveal shifts in tone or ideological framing, and provide evidence-based guidance for selecting or revising texts that maximize both engagement and learning outcomes. Moreover, readability analysis complements other corpus-based or computational methods, such as sentiment analysis, text classification, and topic modelling, offering a multidimensional view of how content, style, and structure interact in shaping the educational experience. Ultimately, integrating linguistic insights into textbook design and evaluation supports a more equitable, effective, and reflective pedagogy, allowing students to critically engage with complex texts while developing both cognitive growth and ethical awareness.

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